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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000807

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SUBJECT: Thich Huyen Quang Tarries in Hanoi

Ref: HANOI 0631

Please stay

11. (SBU) Thich Huyen Quang, Patriarch of the pre-1975 United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), explained to emboffs on April 1 that he had not yet returned to Quang Ngai province because senior GVN officials still wished to meet with him. He noted that he had been "invited" to stay for such meetings by a Ministry of Public Security official, and that he was quite willing to do so. Thich Huyen Quang said that he did not know exactly who wanted to meet him but speculated that it was Prime Minister Phan Van Khai or Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. He believes the meeting might take place in the next few days.

12. (U) The Patriarch emphasized that GVN had not/not required him to stay in Hanoi, as claimed by some international followers. He indicated that he still planned to return to Quang Ngai "in a few days" after the meeting(s). He noted that he had already written to Quang Ngai provincial authorities to inform them that he would return to "resume the conditions of my house arrest."

13. (U) Thich Huyen Quang expressed appreciation for Ambassador's interest in calling on him; a tentative meeting has been set for April 4.

Train troubles

14. (SBU) Thich Huyen Quang's followers provided two different accounts of attempts to purchase train tickets to return to the south, apparently before the MPS "invitation" to stay. One stated that the party numbered ten people; it had proven impossible to buy a block of ten tickets so that they could travel together unless they delayed their travel several days. A young monk separately claimed that he had been the one who had gone to the train station and been refused tickets without explanation. He speculated that tickets were likely available, but that the GVN had ordered the railway not to sell them to him. (Note: This would suggest active MPS monitoring of the comings and goings of Thich Huyen Quang and supporters, which is not improbable. End note)

Expressing his views

15. (SBU) Thich Huyen Quang said that he had sent a six-point letter drafted by Thich Tue Sy to the GVN on or about March 26. Thich Huyen Quang declined to describe the content of this letter, apart from indicating that it was critical on the Government Committee on Religious Affairs' handling of religion. Later that day, a GVN official contacted the head nun of Kim Lien Pagoda, where Thich Huyen Quang's party has been staying. The official reportedly informed her that Thich Tue Sy should not be allowed to remain there any longer. The monk apparently departed Hanoi that night. The Patriarch initially indicated that Thich Tue Sy had left because the GVN had found three of the letter's six points objectionable, but another follower separately noted that Thich Tue Sy had left primarily because he does not have a identification card or a residence registration and is therefore unable to stay anywhere other than his legal place of residence more than ten days. The Patriarch said that he had subsequently sent a second letter to the GVN withdrawing the three most controversial points of the first letter.

Paying the bills

16. (U) Thich Huyen Quang said that his followers had initially paid his hospital bills. Subsequently, the GVN had insisted on picking up the tab, and the hospital then

reimbursed the followers for these expenses, which ran only about 1.5 million dong (USD 100).

Comment

17. (SBU) Reports that Thich Huyen Quang is being kept in Hanoi against his will appear to be wholly incorrect. His followers here, as well as at the International Buddhist Information Bureau in Paris, seem to have their factional differences and appear to generate these contradictory and sometimes factually false accounts, likely for their own anti-SRV or personal agendas. A meeting between the UBCV Patriarch and Prime Minister Khai or Deputy Prime Minister Dung would be unprecedented, as apparently was the call on him by Vietnam Fatherland Front Head Pham The Duet. Thich Huyen Quang does not/not appear to be under any imminent threat from the GVN and there has been no obvious effort by the GVN to limit access to the Patriarch while he has been in Hanoi. It is not clear what may have led to this possible change of heart by the CPV and GVN, but repeated expressions of concern by the USG and international observers, as well as decades of bad publicity generated by the IBIB and others, may have begun to wear away at the stone and convinced them that a little respect to an elderly bonze would not actually be fatal to the SRV or endanger "national solidarity."
BURGHARDT